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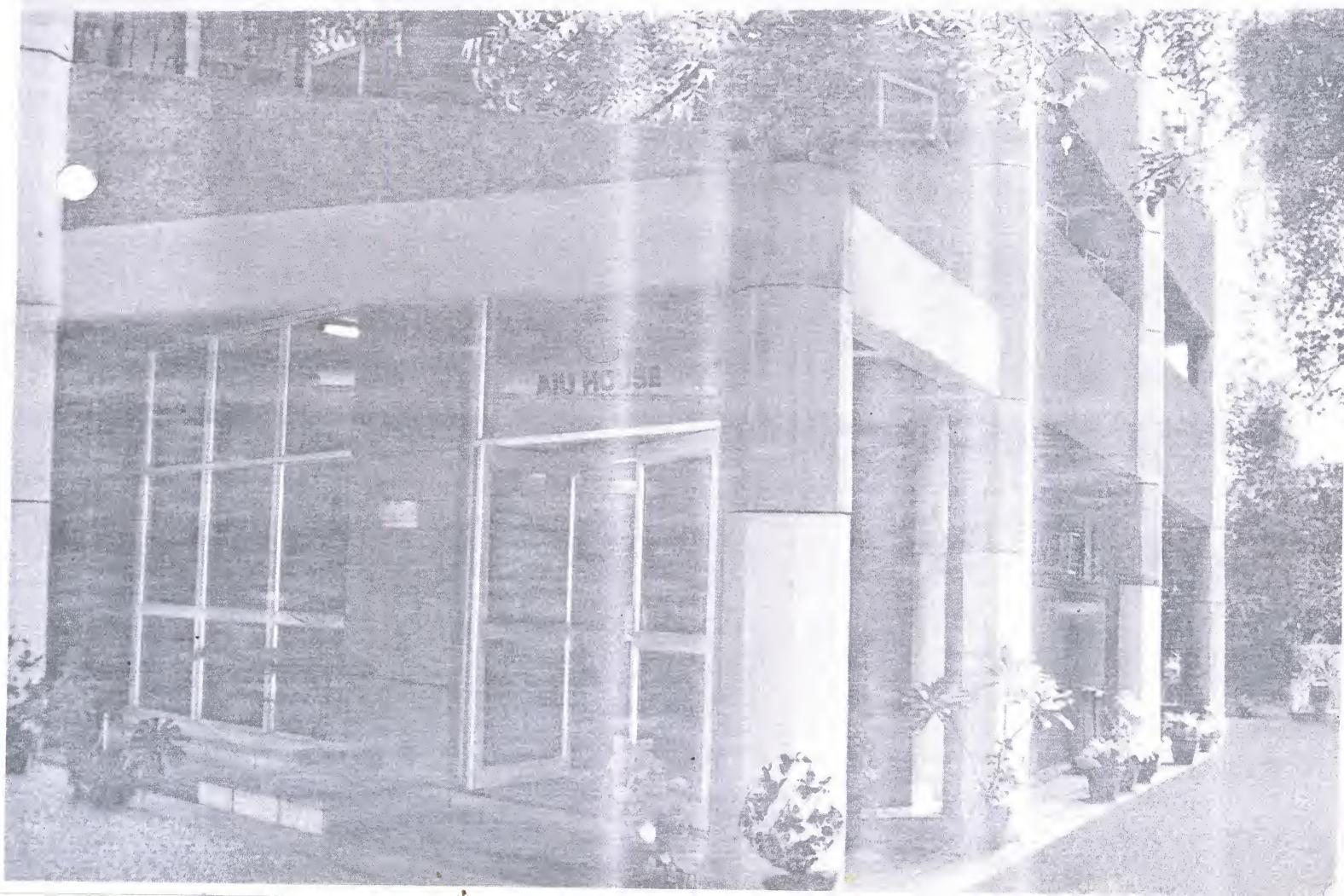
# University News

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# Higher Education in India: A Search for Excellence

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The politics of higher education and the economics of educational marketing should be subjected to academic scrutiny if the teaching profession/pedagogy and research in India has to achieve excellence in Higher Education.

Since ancient times higher education is being viewed as an eternal saga of the human mind to free itself from the shackles of ignorance and to achieve grand unity with the supernatural. It is the struggle of the conscience to transcend the limits of obdurate humanity and enter the realm of divinity. It is the quest to achieve a just society rather than an ordered one.

Great institutions arise out of matrix of rationality and have to set forth a rational synthesis. We invent by intuition and prove by logic. When the spirit in man inspires the intellect we have genius, when it stirs the will we have heroism, when it flows through the heart we have love, and when it transforms our being, the son of man becomes son of god. What India needs today is a wider distribution of Intellectuals who stand for lofty academic ideals.

If knowledge became too great for communication, it would degenerate into scholasticism and the weak acceptance of authority, at which time academicians sounded the call for the removal of these barriers between knowledge and need for the humanization of knowledge towards the fulfillment of human science goals in both developed and developing nations whose sole aim is democratization which is the crux of the fourth generation human rights jurisprudence. These human rights perspectives were well focused as they assume great significance in the present age of 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generation human rights. The enormous significance of quality research in the present day context, mainly in cognitive anomalies, consciousness and Yoga is viewed as socially relevant human science oriented work of seminal importance in the contemporary context.

'Talent cannot originate, genius must' (Bloom)

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2002). If a few Indian universities are to become world class they have to facilitate the origination of geniuses who can 'push at boundaries of the existing world to extend and unleash human potential.' If MIT (Massachusetts Institution of Technology) is recognized as a world class university, it is because it derives its strength from its faculty who have a passion for 'leaping into the dark and reach for the unknown'.

Education is a means by which knowledge is transmitted and skills developed. Beneath what appears to be a relatively simple statement exists a complex matrix of pedagogic and cultural practices that inform, shape and give effect to what information is chosen and how it is understood, transmitted and received. University education in its widest sense is a whole-person process, where the focus is not so much on the teaching and learning of specific skills or training as it is on the cultivation of personal autonomy, intellectual independence and the development of life-long critical perspectives. At the very least, university education ought to strive to prepare people for a changing world by promoting the intellectual and analytical skills that will assist them in assessing choices about their lives. Thus, the influence of education extends far beyond the classroom to all aspects of a person's life.

Higher Education has long been the subject of inquiry into its purpose and methods and the landscape of higher pedagogy reflects the diversity of interest it has generated in human science. Recently there has been a focus on higher education within a wider knowledge context, examining the teaching learning and research as part of the overall project of developing analytical and conceptual skills as exemplified in the whole-person process of university education which includes the subjects like Philosophy, Psychology and human sciences curriculum to reach excellence in global standards.

Education — 'as a socio-cultural structure and process is, in all its various forms, intimately connected with the production and dissemination of foundational knowledge and therefore with the re-creation and reproduction of differential valuations and hierarchies of knowledge.

Education must be understood as a social process that is steeped in cultural signifiers and is neither

objective nor value-neutral. The material we learn by, understand and teach by is affected by our own ideological and pedagogic influences and assumptions, just as our students are similarly affected. Once we are aware of these phenomena, they can become powerful teaching and learning tools and resources that allow us more fully to examine, engage and connect with people and information and to become a part of rather than apart from the world around us. Moreover, in teaching any subject in a cross-cultural and cross-experiential fashion we make it matter to all our students. This, ultimately, relates to the fundamental principles of higher education. We want to ensure that students develop those analytical, conceptual, research oriented and other intellectual skills which will enable them to make better choices in their lives, to become better citizens and to determine their place in the world and their relationship to it. At the same time we are also committed to higher education that is professionally as well as socially and culturally relevant.

The advances in recombinant DNA engineering, Micro-chip Technology have been spectacularly wide ranging and related to almost every area of human life. Advances in computer technology give rise to a whole variety of technologies and underlie the 'promise' and 'perils' of new forms of emergent nanotechnologies which pose a serious challenge to the Higher Education.

The emergence of Information Technology and Biotechnology is a decisive transformation that marks globalisation. The contemporary world stands transformed in several ways by the revolution in microchips and integrated circuitry. It enables patterns of time-space compression, a defining feature of contemporary globalisation. It makes real, the hitherto unimaginable advances in genetic sciences and strategic biotechnologies. Advances in recombinant DNA technologies and integrated circuitry depend wholly on revolutionary techniques of artificial intelligence.

This development provides a driving force for the global emergence of trade related market friendly human rights and human capabilities. This leads to movements towards redefinitions of impoverishment. Poverty in terms of access to information or to cyberspace enhanced human capabilities mark what is known as digital divide.

The emergence of Information Technologies has facilitated widespread privatization of Governmental functions in welfare administration, health, education, finance, business and industries etc. Digitalisation of the

world provides time and space for increased and luminous solidarity among the academic fraternity

These also give birth to the formation of techno-science based strategic industries that resent and often reject state and international regulation and generate new forms of techno-politics. Together, these constitute a genomic materiality of globalization (little noticed in social theory narratives of globalization) contributing to the formation of 'New World Order'. Biotechnologies, united in the pursuit of reductionist life sciences- where 'life' is no more than information open to techno-science codification, manipulation and diverse techniques of mutation and reproduction—fall into several domains of human science. Agricultural biotechnology, fostered by agribusiness, promises food for all; pharmaceutical biotechnology promises health for all; industrial biotechnology promises sustainable development for the world and the human genome projects, among other things, now promise new possibilities in therapeutics, health care and benign human cloning. The belief that biotechnology provides unprecedented vistas of human progress is not just media hype; its practitioners, in all parts of the world, live by it. The University nay multiversity must invariably keep in mind the above-mentioned advances in techno-sciences while formulating curriculum and promoting research, pedagogic skills and ideology. These developing technologies must be addressed by the Educators and Researchers for achieving the goals of higher education quality.

Information technology and Internet have become part of our daily life in contemporary society which make life easier, quicker, and cheaper. Computer is not only useful for communication and information processing but also useful for typing, editing, drawing, copying, printing, musical purposes, to use as remote control, useful for wireless, mobile phone network, microwave, door keys and almost all around the human society. This tremendous usefulness of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) encouraged the pursuit of quality higher education. The present education system needs to be adapted and reformed to make it more effective and resilient.

Nicholas Negroponte talked of the transformation of the world from atoms to bits, a transformation he termed irrevocable, irreplaceable and exponential. Vishal Sikka observes that digital evolution has now set the stage for us to embark on a human revolution. The technology of Being Human is a unique opportunity to leverage individual talent and collective capability



technology advances. The renaissance of our community driven by a host of powerful new technologies and concepts from artificial intelligence to design thinking, from pervasive connectedness to ubiquitous learning which will coverage to amplify our potential, capability and experience. In our pursuit to become more human and to have technology enable us to further enhance our humanity, we need higher education, which is the foundation to build knowledge and skills, imagination and creativity and learnability both real and virtual.

The recent advances in the Artificial Intelligence (AI) is another area which needs to be explored for raising the quality in Higher Education particularly in research in several areas or disciplines. Recently distinguished physicist Stephen Hawking warns that development of full-fledged autonomous Artificial Intelligence(AI) could spell the end of human race. Elon Musk a technology entrepreneur whose company Space X ferries cargo to the International Space Station cautions that full-fledged Artificial Intelligence (AI) poses an existential crisis for the human race.

The great human endeavour is about exploring uncharted territory with hope and unbounded ambition. Artificial Intelligence amounts to the frontier of frontiers. Though, Artificial Intelligence (AI) cannot give 100% goodness guarantee, yet it can deliver us a grand future, where humans conquer space, aging and poverty. Grandest innovations are coming from the marriage of human and machine intelligence – the magnet of things shows a sort of collective like mind emerging, soaring past the intellect of individual creators. Human like machine intelligence can leapfrog the Darwinian time scale whose exponentially rising computing powers can fix the global warming equation before we all choke to death. Artificial Intelligence (AI) can be driven by service rather than conquest, empathy and humanity. It perhaps, is our only guarantee for survival in the next 2000 years (Rudroneel and Renuka). The solution for quality in Indian Higher Education should be such innovations, then alone the higher education system's existence and continuance will be more meaningful and rewarding.

Computer generated make believe environment that is distinguished from reality or real thing through emerging technology that combines data processing and graphics to experience three dimensional existence (the lower), providing total symbiosis between the real and the virtual space is known as Virtual Reality. This technology can change the whole gamut

of Higher education environment leading to virtual classrooms and skill development techniques. Virtual classrooms and skill development techniques may dispense with full time not so essential staff also as in the case of Computerized Axial Tomography (CAT).

As Dr. A P J Abdul Kalam insists, the acquisition of knowledge has been the thrust area throughout the world. Educational needs have changed tremendously overtime. There is a transition from service revolution to knowledge revolution. Through higher education we not only acquire knowledge and information skills but values and ability to live and interact with social groups. Higher Education is essential for any nation's overall development.

It is no wonder as in Ancient times too, education as a whole-person process was in vogue in *Nalanda*. There were four more universities during the same period-*Vikramashila*, *Sompura*, *Odantapura* and *Jaggadala* and together these five formed an interlinking group for Buddhist studies. *Nalanda* was one of the world's early residential universities and it covered every field of learning – science, astronomy, medicine and logic as well as metaphysics, philosophy, Samkhya, *Yoga-shastra*, the *Veda* and the scriptures of Buddhism. Students studied foreign philosophy also and it attracted pupils and scholars from other countries such as Korea, Japan, China, Tibet, Indonesia, Persia and Turkey. But the decline had started by the 9<sup>th</sup> century and with the advent of Islam under *Bahman Khalji*, *Nalanda* was reportedly burnt and destroyed. Thus *Nalanda*, earlier than the European universities, pioneered the model for integral learning where students studied science and philosophy together.

Ancient Indians defferentiated knowledge into two types. *Apara vidya* (lower knowledge) and *para vidya* (higher). Somehow these definitions continue to be valid for our discussion even today as well. *Apara vidya* is a kind of knowledge, which seeks to understand the apparent phenomenon of existence externally, by an approach from outside, through the senses and the intellect. This is how we acquire lower knowledge. The lower knowledge constitutes all human knowledge acquired through books or experiments. Even the Vedas fall in this category since they are not themselves the direct experience of the Self and of the eternal that is beyond all beings. *Para vidya* is the knowledge, which seeks to know the truth of existence from within. This mystic knowledge does not follow any of the well-known steps of research. Indian mystics continue to talk of *samadhi*, the awakening of *kundalini*, *yogic*

...andras, etc. that yielded definitive results in intellectual pursuits.

Three types of knowledge Indians have eventually developed. The first one is metaphysical or intuitive knowledge. We need not deal with this form of knowledge because it is a matter of individual experience and consciousness. The second form of knowledge is rational or logical knowledge. India happens to have a vast body of literature in this field and interestingly it is far advanced than the West. We are the only people in the world who developed a logical method or reasoning called 'vitanda.' Second was the development of *samanyam*, researched knowledge. This was called rational knowledge. The development of logic in *Nyaya* or *Astanga* philosophies is the typical product of that age and effort. It is this phase of development that came to its eventual fruition in the philosophical contributions of Nagarjuna and Dharmakirti. A glimpse of their logic can be witnessed in *Milindapanha* (the dialogue between King Mahendra and Nagsena).

Then came the third experimental sciences. This form of knowledge was a descent but a step towards progress. This gave us some of the greatest scientists and physicians. The astronomers, mathematicians, physicians etc. are the product of this knowledge. William James recorded: "From the Vedas (ancient Indian scriptures) we learn a practical art of surgery, medicine, music, how to building under which mechanized art is included. They are encyclopedia of every aspect of life, culture, religion, science, ethics, law, cosmology and meteorology. By three methods we learn wisdom i.e. i) reflection, which comes by way of intuition and contemplation, ii) imitation which is the easiest and iii) experience which is the bitterest, as asserted by Confucius are similar to the above.

We need value based models of development to add spiritual and human dimensions to scientific knowledge. University studies need urgent restructuring to recognize the symbiotic relationship between science and religion, between theoretical understanding and practical training. The M.T.'s motto *Mens et Manus* (Mind and Hand) exemplifies the spirit of universality in education meant for the cultivation of the mind, fostering intelligence, inventiveness and practical knowledge to serve as a roadmap for the future.

This is what is missing in our universities – the search for 'mystery' which by definition is a quality that makes something difficult to explain, understand,

or get information about, especially when it also makes them seem interesting or exciting. We have to re-invent higher education with a futuristic roadmap and infuse quality and excellence in our universities to enable our young men and women to understand and practise the Senecan ideal of 'cultivating humanity' and to highlight his vision and mission.

The faculty has to undergo a special course designed to cultivating a broad social, cultural, political, literary, artistic and philosophical understanding that can be later brought to bear on their specialized fields to promote quality in Higher Education.

Tagore emphasized that the holistic approach to education involves fostering development of concrete knowledge and self-awareness. Contemplative pedagogy more specifically known as '*Kriya Yoga*' represents one viable avenue through which a harmony between mind, body and education can be achieved. The science of '*Kriya Yoga*' was developed as a part of Indic studies in one of the American Universities (U Mass-D). The students are impressed by the objective of the course viz. the key to scientific pursuit is objectivity. Zajonc puts it as hearing spaces that privilege cognitive learning only and turn away any parts or places where incomplete learning happens. Connections between mind and body in learning represent even deeper links than cognitive and affective learning connections (Moureen P. Hall et al)

Research on mind-body interactions has highlighted how influential is knowing about the body which can influence both psychological and physical well-being. Not surprisingly, neuroimaging research has shown positive relationships between experience with contemplative practice and cortical gray matter in areas of the brain associated with somatosensation, or our own awareness of the body and its states (Desbordes, et al., 2012) In addition to these findings, experience with contemplative practice is also found to be positively correlated with cortical thickness in areas of the brain associated with memory, attention, and cognitive control (Hozel, et al., 2011) as well as areas associated with emotional regulation (Luders, et al., 2009). Increases in cortical thickness in these areas suggest that individuals with experience in contemplative practice are more efficient at their related functions.

Corresponding with the neuroimaging data, experience with contemplative practice has been found to be related to more efficient processing of information, increased attention stability, increased



memory capacity and verbal fluence, and intrusive thoughts (Mrazek, Franklin, Phillips, Baird, & Schooler, 2013). Changes in stress, depressive symptoms, rumination, system functioning, and pain sensitivity, elicited as a response to increased mindfulness, seem to be a byproduct of the aforementioned cognitive changes.

Research suggests that contemplative practice is especially beneficial to educators. Swami Vivekananda observed that the education is the perfection of the perfection already present in man. Education emphasizes three concepts viz. capacity, creativity and capability.

It is time for the universities to turn our information consumers into idea explorers. We are in the process of changing more and more. Let us also develop a group of scholars and researchers to think about it. Universities cultivating excellence are the ones to generate ideas so that we have a new set of thinkers to generate ideas. To concretise these ideas we should increase competitiveness among the universities - to compete for excellence and knowledge revolution to improve in global ranking system.

The methodologies of all the three main global rankings differ:

The Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), known as the Shanghai Rankings is the most objective because it simply measures

objective data such as research productivity and impact. But it is limited to research and gives an advantage to the main English-speaking universities in the US and Britain.

- (ii) Times Higher Education (THE) focuses on research but also has some measures for teaching and other university activities, and uses a reputational survey for 25 per cent of its ranking.
- (iii) Quacquarelli Symonds (QS), a for-profit education company based in Britain, relies most on a reputational survey - about half of the total score. The reputation components are the most questionable in terms of validity, because of methodological and other issues. The more reputation is counted, the less valuable the result.

In this backdrop it is desirable that India needs to develop its own ranking mechanism taking into consideration the indigenous element to promote healthy competition among academics and higher educational institutions. In this effort the Association of Indian universities can play a vital role in evolving a suitable mechanism to develop methodology for Ranking in India. Very recently responding to a question in the Lok Sabha the HRD Minister said that Government is keen to amend the UGC Act to regulate higher education system in the country and promote quality and access and also asserted that Government is committed to introduce a new scheme to train teachers and draw up parameters for national ranking of universities. Both are welcome steps for the quality improvement in higher education. □

(on pg.30)

- Value-Based Education purifies heart, provides fraternity, links with people in the family and in the society and it helps oneself to be a complete human being.
- Among the primitive cultures the term *education* and *enculturation*, which is the process of cultural transmission.
- The purpose of primitive education was to train children to become good members of their tribe or band, giving emphasis upon training for leadership.
- The present Teaching – Learning Process in Higher Education mainly aims to transfer bookish knowledge through class room lectures, having examination oriented approach.

- In every programme of Higher Education a course on Value Education should be included in the Curriculum.
- The Value Education course shall include the cultural values present in the literature, like Thirukkural, religious preaching and preaching of noble people like Swami Vivekananda and Bedadri Maharishi who has given scientific understanding of life through his “vision for wisdom” courses.

### Conclusion

Promotion of Excellence in Higher Education is possible only through collective efforts of all the stakeholders, including the Institutions, Industries, the Governments Central and State, the Students, Parents and the community as whole. □